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Mr Ray Baker
Headteacher
Siddal Moor Sports College
Newhouse Road
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Dear Mr Baker

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Siddal Moor Sports College, Rochdale

Following my visit to your school on 22 June 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement in March 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure that senior leaders measure the impact of their actions to evaluate effectively how well the school is improving
- sharpen the school development plan so that targets for attainment and progress are expressed by year and student groups, rather than just headline figures so senior leaders and governors can monitor progress more rigorously
- ensure that all staff implement, consistently, the agreed actions to improve the school in order to maximise the impact on students' outcomes.

Evidence

During this visit I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher responsible for quality assurance, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority, a national leader of education who is working with the senior team and a group of subject leaders. I also met a group of Year 10 students who shared with me their opinions about the school, and together we looked at the quality of the marking in some of their exercise books. You accompanied me on a tour of the school where we made a number of short visits to lessons. I scrutinised a selection of school documents including senior leaders' evaluation of how well the school is doing, the school development plan, the school's most recent data on students' attainment and progress and the school's most recent behaviour and attendance records.

Context

Since the most recent inspection the governing body has been restructured. Its membership has been boosted by a number of new governors who have a background in education. As a result, the governing body is better equipped to hold senior leaders to account for the progress that the school is making against each of the improvement priorities in the school development plan. A specialist teacher of mathematics joined the school at the start of the summer term to replace a member of staff who left at Easter. The governors have appointed two science teachers who will take up their posts in September.

Main findings

Senior leaders and governors accept the findings of the most recent inspection and agree that the areas for improvement, as described in the report, are the right ones for the school. They also acknowledge that the report accurately reflects the school's strengths.

You and your colleagues recognise that the most pressing priority in order to improve the school quickly is to enhance the quality of teachers' classroom practice. To address this priority, senior leaders have introduced a step-by-step guide to lesson planning, which all staff are expected to follow. This method of planning ensures that teachers give due regard to clarifying for students what they are expected to learn in lessons, plan activities that meet students' needs and consider how their questioning can help students grasp the key ideas and deepen their understanding. To improve the quality of students' classroom experience further, senior leaders have established a set of clear and consistent routines for students to follow which are brought together under the banner of 'the perfect learner'. These routines are ensuring that students arrive punctually to lessons, with the correct equipment and ready to learn. As a consequence of these new approaches, the school reports that the attainment and progress of students at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 are improving and gaps between the attainment and progress of

disadvantaged students and their peers are closing. In addition, the school's data are also indicating an improving trend in students' behaviour and conduct, both in lessons and around the school. When asked, students confirmed that behaviour is improving as a result of staff's consistent approach to implementing the school's behaviour policy.

Senior leaders' work to improve the quality of marking and feedback is beginning to yield benefits for students. In the sample of books that I scrutinised I found effective marking in English and mathematics. For example, in English, work is routinely evaluated by the teacher, with students given clear advice on what they need to do to improve their work, which they then act on. In mathematics, students are given regular feedback, which enables them to identify their strengths and what they need to do to improve their understanding of the key ideas. However, not all marking is yet of this quality and you are aware that further work needs to be done to bring all teachers' marking up to the standard of the best.

Senior leaders report that much greater rigour has been introduced to monitoring the quality of teachers' professional practice. Senior leaders regularly observe lessons, scrutinise the work in students' books and analyse achievement data to make judgements on the impact that teachers are having on students' learning. The reliability of students' data and senior leaders' judgements on the quality of teaching has been checked by their colleagues from the national support school. Consequently, you and your colleagues have a firm foundation on which to hold colleagues to account for the quality of their professional practice and students' outcomes. Senior leaders recognise that monitoring and evaluating the work of the school falls too heavily on their shoulders. They are now involving subject leaders, to spread the load and increase lines of accountability. However, although subject leaders are undergoing training to increase their expertise in this aspect of their work, it is a relatively new initiative and consequently too early to assess its impact.

The school development plan is structured so that it is clear what actions are going to be taken, term by term, to address each of the school improvement priorities. Senior leaders and governors have considered the manageability of the plan and made sure that staff are not trying to do everything at the same time. Senior leaders keep the plan under regular review and progress against each of the priorities is monitored by the governing body. Nevertheless, the plan could be sharper. Attainment and progress targets for students' outcomes are expressed as headline figures and not in terms of years and student groups. Consequently, this makes it difficult for governors to determine whether targets are challenging enough for some groups, for example disadvantaged students.

Senior leaders and governors know the school well. Their written evaluation of how well the school is doing is detailed and describes the work being done to bring about the necessary improvements. However, the document tends to be too descriptive, with senior leaders not putting enough emphasis on the impact of the actions they are taking.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

Since your appointment senior leaders and governors have been working effectively with the local authority to improve the school. The local authority has brokered a successful link for you and your colleagues with an outstanding school from a neighbouring local authority. The headteacher of this school, who is a national leader of education, is working with you and other members of the senior leadership team to help build capacity. Teachers from Siddal Moor have visited this partner school observe good practice. An early measure of the impact of these visits is that senior leaders have much greater confidence in the reliability of teachers' assessments of students' progress. Further, plans are in place for the support school to help train middle leaders in order to develop their expertise in monitoring and evaluating the work of their subject departments and, as a result, help accelerate the pace of improvement.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Rochdale.

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry
Her Majesty's Inspector